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ABSTRACT

Because of the diversity of Arabic dialects (Lebanese, Iraqi, Syrian, Algerian, Moroccan, Libyan, Sudanese, Saudi Arabian, Palestinian, and Egyptian), and the fact that Arabic writing allows for a wide range of different pronunciations, the question faced by students is where to begin. It is instructive to consider how this problem is dealt with in modern foreign language teaching, English being a case in point. It is "inconceivable" to teach English without specific reference to the spoken forms actually used either in the United States or in the United Kingdom. The dialect form chosen should be an educated form of speech and have "significant applicability." The foreign learner should find Cultivated Cairene Arabic an especially useful dialect with which to start learning Arabic. It provides a relatively smooth transition from the spoken to the literary language, particularly as used by mass media writers. It is the form of language spoken by a socially acceptable group representative of modern Arab culture as a whole. (Any other cultivated dialect of the important Arab Centers, however, may also accomplish the goals of teaching beginning Arabic.) The major categories of Arabic are defined as (1) Classical or Koranic, (2) Literary or Contemporary Literary, and (3) Colloquial or Spoken. The authors suggest a teaching method moving from Cultivated Spoken to the Literary. (AMM)

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DIALECT VARIATIONS AND THE TEACHING OF ARABIC AS A LIVING LANGUAGE*

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Interest in the teaching of contemporary Arabic in American Institutions, though relatively recent, has been steadily growing since the introduction of the Arabic program into the Army Language School in 1947. There is evidence that Arabic studies are being gradually recognized as an important field of study. More than twenty-seven institutions are now offering courses in the culture and civilization of the Middle Eastern countries and in Arabic. During the academic year 1963-64 Arabic, as one of seven major languages, was supported by the federal government (NDEA) in eight out of thirty-five institutions.[1]

But once the interest in Arabic has been aroused and the need to study it established, the question is where to begin. There is a great diversity of Arabic dialects: Lebanese, Iraqi, Syrian, Algerian, Moroccan, Libyan, Sudanese, Saudi Arabian, Palestinian, and Egyptian. What is more, each of these dialects has a number of distinct sub-dialects. Thus, within the Egyptian dialect, Lower and Upper Egyptian forms of speech can be distinguished. The problem is further complicated by the fact that Arabic writing allows a wide range of different pronunciations.

The present practice in American institutions seems to assume a complete dichotomy of "dialect" and "literary" Arabic; there is no serious

AL 002 179

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[1] The Linguistic Reporter, V (October, 1963), p. 5.

attempt to effect a smooth transition from the one to the other. Thus in many colleges two separate courses are offered under the designations "spoken Arabic" and "written Arabic." Such a situation is far from satisfactory, for if the goal in the former course is to enable the students to speak, the effort may be a sheer waste of time on the part of the majority of students who do not have the chance to go to the specific area whose dialect they have been taught. If, on the other hand, the student is to be acquainted with written forms without reference to dialect, he can hardly be said to be learning a living language. Such an approach would be not only unrealistic but also contradictory to the linguistic concept that speech is primary and writing is only its symbolization.

An acceptable approach should be both practical and consistent with modern linguistic concepts. At this point it may be helpful, and indeed instructive, to consider what is being done in the teaching of modern foreign languages. The teaching of English is a case in point. It would be inconceivable, for example, to teach English without specific reference to the spoken forms actually used either in the United States or in the United Kingdom. There is no reason why Arabic should not be similarly treated as a living language. It may be argued, however, that the question remains: If we start with the spoken form, which dialect should we choose? The answer to this question can be determined only in the light of the goals to be achieved.

To refer once more to the teaching of English as a foreign language, we find that the situation is pertinent at least as far as the general principles are concern. Of all the dialectal varieties of British English, the foreign learner usually chooses "Received English," and of all the

American English varieties he usually prefers the "Northern dialect." The choice in both cases is determined by many factors but, above all, by two main criteria, namely, that it is an educated form of speech and that it has significant applicability. In other words, the forms chosen should enable the learner to achieve maximum effective communication in the sense of understanding and being understood by speakers of the target language.

Turning to the situation in Arabic, we realize that the language as a mother tongue is spoken by some ninety million people and as a foreign language is used by more than four hundred million Muslims scattered throughout Africa and Asia. We also realize that since the rise of Arab nationalism there has been an increasing awareness of a common culture and a common language. Thanks to cultural exchange and to the pervasive influence of mass media, the dialectal differences, though they still exist, have not hampered cultural unity and the educated form of speech, particularly that of large cultural centers, tends to be understood even by those who do not speak it. This is precisely why the foreign learner of Arabic should turn to a large cultural center where he can find a medium of communication which may help him understand not only a specific section of the Arab world but also a significant part of Arab culture. In almost every Arab country there is an important cultural center; thus Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut form the most important cultural centers in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon respectively.

There can be no doubt that by far the largest Arab country is Egypt and the largest Arab center is Cairo.[2] The educated speech of Cairo may there-

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[2]The population of Cairo (1966 estimation) is four million and that of the U.A.R. is 30 million.

fore be considered particularly significant from the point of view of the English speaker who is looking for a means of communication with a maximum applicability throughout the Arab countries. However, any of the other cultivated dialects (e.g., CBA, CDA, C^{M}A, etc.) may be equally useful in beginning Arabic.[3]

It is true that there are a number of reasons why the English speaker, or indeed any foreign learner, should find Cultivated Cairene Arabic (CCA) an especially useful dialect with which to start learning Arabic. In a sense CCA provides a relatively smooth transition from the spoken to the literary language especially as used by mass media writers. Moreover, it is the form of language spoken by a socially acceptable group representative not only of Egyptian life but of modern Arab culture as a whole. There is evidence that Cairo plays a leading role in Arabic and Islamic culture, since it possesses, among other things, two great institutions, namely, Cairo University and Al-Azhar; the one is the largest and most advanced in the Arab countries, and the other is the oldest and most influential center throughout the Islamic world. Students from all over the world, but especially from Arab countries, come to Cairo to study for long periods of time. It may also be mentioned that a great number of Egyptian teachers, who are graduates of Cairo institutions, go to teach in other Arab countries. Furthermore, a great number of important cultural Arab events take place in Cairo. Nevertheless, the success and effectiveness of a sound approach to teaching Arabic as a living language, may be equally achieved through the use of the other cultivated dialects. As we have already pointed out a Cultivated Beirut Arabic, Cultivated Damascus Arabic, or any other cultivated dialect of the important Arab Centers may accomplish the goals of teaching beginning Arabic.

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3. Cultivated Beirut Arabic; Cultivated Damascene Arabic; Cultivated Moroccan Arabic.

The form of Arabic suggested as a basis for the beginning stage, be it CCA or CBA, is that which is usually heard in the speech of native Arabs who have had a college education. It is used as informal Arabic by mass media and some writers of literary prestige. It may be said that it is widely understood throughout the majority of the Arab countries, thanks to mass media.[4] Although it would be inaccurate to describe this form of Arabic as uniquely standard, it may be considered as socially acceptable and statistically significant.

What is suggested here is that one form of beginning Arabic can be practically helpful, if not actually necessary, and that for linguistic as well as cultural considerations, any of these Cultivated Arabic dialects can be appropriately used as a first step toward understanding contemporary Arabic. Other forms of Arabic may be of value to those who are interested in the study of dialects in general or one particular dialect for individual reasons.

The relationship between "colloquial" and what is often called "standard" Arabic should be clearly defined. In any language there are cultural levels of usage and functional varieties, and to make effective use of Arabic one has to be aware of these levels and functions. Furthermore, Arabic has not remained static over the centuries. We may therefore distinguish at least three major designations:

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[4]Egyptian television service, for example, started in the summer of 1960 and now operates on four channels. Some Egyptian programs are relayed to other Arab countries.

1. "Classical Arabic" or "Koranic Arabic" refers specifically to the grammar and usage of the Koran up to the period of the Caliphs.
2. "Literary Arabic" or "Contemporary Literary Arabic" refers specifically to Arabic grammar and usage in the modern time. Within the category we may emphasize "formal" written Arabic though it would be a gross error to ignore writings including "informal" or spoken Arabic.
3. "Colloquial" or "Spoken Arabic" refers to the form of Arabic used by educated Arabs in everyday conversation. It should be noted, however, that even uneducated Arabs occasionally use formal and classical patterns in their speech.

Needless to say, these three categories are overlapping and it is the proportion used that determines the type of Arabic. Our contention is that the educated form of speech provides a transition from the spoken to the literary. To illustrate this, we may note that the use of /q/ occurs more often in educated speech. Besides, educated speech is characterized by more "learned" vocabulary and more grammatical distinctions than any other form of spoken Arabic.

While linguistic change is most limited on the syntactical level, it is noticeable on the morphological and phonological levels and, above all, in the amount of loan words. "Contemporary Formal Arabic" can be easily distinguished from Classical Arabic on the lexical level because of the large number of foreign words contained, particularly French, Italian, and English, e.g. /tilivizyo:n/, /supra:na/, /villa/. On the morphological level, Contemporary Arabic tends to make fewer distinctions.

Colloquial Arabic[5], on the other hand, makes even fewer distinctions and incorporates a larger number of foreign terms. On the phonological level, colloquial is characterized by:

1. Use of stress and final pause in place of vowel ending

   Examples: Kátab "he wrote" instead of Kataba

   Wálad "boy" instead of Waladun (nominative)

   Waladan (accusative)

   Waladin (genitive)

2. Use of the front vowel in place of the low vowel

   Examples: ?ilwálad "the boys" in place of ?alwaladu (nominative)

   ?alwalada (accusative)

   ?alwaladi (genitive)

   yiftah "to o pen" in place of yaftahu

3. Use of ŧ or ŝ instead of θ

   ẑ or đ instead of đ

   z or đ instead of ḏ

   ŧánya "second (in order)" /f̄.s̄./

   ŝánya "a second (1/60 minutes)"

   đá:b "it melted" instead of da:ba

   ?iẑa "if" instead of ?ida

   zahar "he appeared" instead of dahara

   đahr "black" instead of dahr

4. Use of pharyngealization on a larger scale

   Examples: fard, "individual" and fard, "duty" in Classical Arabic

   fard for both forms in Colloquial Arabic

The assumption is that in learning any language we move from speech

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5. The examples given are taken from Cultivated Cairene Arabic.

to writing or from sound to script. For that reason, phonemic writing method can be used at first to represent the sounds of Arabic as accurately as possible. It should be noted that habitual and accurate production of sounds is basic to progress in the beginning stage. Careful attention is therefore to be paid to segments of minimal contrasts where there is only one significant difference, to stress, and to intonational patterns. Listening naturally comes before speaking and the ability to distinguish significant speech sounds comes before the ability to produce them. These two skills, however, should be simultaneously developed.

Once the student has developed a degree of facility in recognizing and producing basic Arabic sound patterns, he can effectively be introduced to Arabic script and eventually to literary Arabic.

INTRODUCING LITERARY ARABIC

Not long ago the student would begin his study of Arabic with such verbs as qatala "kill" and daraba "hit," while in learning Latin he first studied amōre "love." It did not matter what content items were given him, so long as they illustrated certain grammatical points. To add to the student's difficulties, no attention was paid to the idea of gradation in presenting the sounds, the sentence structure, or the morphological distinctions. The main emphasis was on vocabulary and "frequency lists" which were, in many cases, controversial.

In more recent times writers of Arabic texts have attempted to reduce all varieties to what is designated "Modern Standard Arabic," and in doing so, they have failed to present Arabic as a living form with its cultural levels and functional varieties. The written symbols are given as the only

acceptable forms and, as a result, the student finds it difficult, if not impossible, to understand a great deal of modern Arabic as presented in political speeches, literary writings, and mass media literature. Furthermore, if he ever used the "standard" forms he would be speaking "like a book," which might be desirable but hardly consistent with the principle of usage and linguistic appropriateness.

To achieve mastery of this "standard" Arabic, modern techniques, such as the audio-lingual, must be used. But techniques do not render content acceptable. They are meaningful only when they are carefully related to a linguistically and pedagogically sound content.

It is with these criticisms in mind that we propose the following guidelines for constructive teaching material in Arabic at the beginning stage.

1. The structural content must be presented in a gradated manner, utilizing the criteria of simplicity, frequency, and relevance. Thus, the phonologically "difficult" Arabic sounds are kept at a minimum in early stages; the syntactically unfamiliar verbles sentences come before verb patterns; morphologiçal distinctions are kept at a minimum in the early stages. For example, the student first may concentrate on a certain pronoun, e.g., 2.s.m., 2.s.f., and 2.pl.

2. Structural patterns must be presented within a matrix of significant cultural context. Here, again, the principle of gradation is applied so that the student may move from the immediate environment (i.e. the classroom) to typically cultural situations (e.g. the family activities).

3. By applying gradation and relating structure to culture, two aims can be realized. On the one hand, the student has a sense of achieve-

ment with the minimum use of "absolute memorization" and, on the other, his interest is aroused in the new culture. In other words, linguistic patterns become meaningful, and help make the learning process both pleasant and effective. Experience shows that the first contact with a foreign language is crucial to learning in the later stages.

4. The present writers believe that a sound method of teaching Arabic as a living language is to move from sounds to letters, from spoken patterns to written forms, and from the familiar to the formal. It is suggested therefore that the Arabic writing system be introduced in steps and only after the fundamentals of the sound system have been adequately mastered. Thus the student may start, with a limited number of rules and apply them to a few familiar words (e.g. ba:b "door," bint "girl," kita:b "book").

The transition to literary Arabic may not always be smooth because the Arabs sometimes use one form in speaking (e.g. ra:h "he has gone") and another in writing (e.g. ḏahab "he has gone"). The gap between the spoken and the written has led many teachers as mentioned earlier, to the view that the form of Arabic to be taught to foreigners should be either the formal or the colloquial. Anything else is considered as undesirable mixing of levels.

This point of view should be carefully examined in the light of our goals in teaching Arabic at the beginning stage. Is the student to learn the coloquial only and as a result have no access to the formal? Or is he to concentrate on the formal and thus have no knowledge of the actual speech of native speakers? It is our contention that any realistic approach consistent with modern concepts in linguistics and language teaching must take into consideration the role of cultivated speech in the continuity of language. This cultivated speech consists of words and expressions that constitute a common language core. And at the beginning stage it is not the gap

between the spoken and the formal language but rather the common core that should be emphasized. It is this common core that also provides the foreign learner with the basis for further study of the language. Thus while the student is aware of functional varieties, he is prepared to proceed smoothly in the study of language.

Starting with the spoken form is the natural beginning to language study. Furthermore, experience has shown its considerable appeal at the beginning stage which, undoubtedly, is the most crucial. It is the stage which may help the student develop his interest in the language or it may fill him with frustration and discouragement.

In beginning Arabic the student is introduced to cultivated spoken Arabic. At the same time through writing Arabic he is gradually acquainted with the writing system of contemporary Arabic in its colloquial and formal varieties. The two steps may be conversed in one term of semi-intensive study (i.e. about five hours per week). By the time he finishes these two steps he should have mastered the basic sound and writing systems in addition to a grammatical core to prepare him for the next step.

In this proposed third step an attempt is to be taken to acquaint the student with modern formal literary Arabic. Here the emphasis is on the formal whether it occurs in a letter, description, or narrative. But, the same basic principles are followed, namely, gradation, repetition, and continuity. Thus, many of the vocabulary terms and expressions previously used in the spoken are reinforced by being used again in a formal context. However, while the spoken usually refers to a specific dialect center (e.g. CCA, CBA) the formal refers to a broader environment so that the student moves from a specific cultural center to the Arab culture as a whole.

With this view in mind, the cultural content must be carefully considered in the structure of the units. We propose units which deal with significant cultural aspects such as religious customs and significant traditions. Furthermore adapted selections from well-known stories and folk literature may be included. For example, one auto-biographical passage may describe the changing Arab culture and one interesting story from Arabian Nights may depict the Arab sense of humor.

Like the cultural content, the grammatical content should be based on what has been covered in the spoken phase. Basic sentence patterns and verb forms should be gradually introduced and consistently reinforced. To help master the grammatical core structural drills of the simple and progressive-substitution and transformation types can be included before and after the main text. An important assumption is that mastering the language are most effectively achieved through structural drills rather than grammatical rules.

Vocabulary should be also carefully controlled to allow greater concentration on basic structures. One related feature that must be emphasized is the use of idioms. This, we feel is more helpful than simply listing synonyms and definitions.

To sum up, the question is often raised is how to start teaching Arabic. In this respect it is suggested that we move from the Cultivated Spoken to the Literary Arabic. Both linguistic and cultural contents should be carefully selected so as to make the transition smooth and learning the language effective. The goal to be achieved is to provide a basis for beginning Arabic as a living language in its informal and formal varieties.